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NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

Texas Reserve is 27th in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

About 200 people, including federal, state and local officials, local property owners and businessmen celebrated the designation of 185,708 acres of marshes, mangroves, open water and coastal prairie in southeastern Texas as the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve (MANERR) in Port Aransas, Tex., on May 6.

The designation ceremony included the signing of the ceremonial designation certificate by VADM Conrad C. Lautenbacher (USN-Ret.), administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); University of Texas President William Powers; and John H. Dunnigan, assistant administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service. "As the first reserve in the western Gulf of Mexico, Mission-Aransas adds significant value to the National Estuarine Research Reserve System and broadens the opportunities to study, understand, and manage America's coastal ecosystems," said Lautenbacher.

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System is a federal-state partnership between NOAA and coastal states. NOAA provides funding and national program guidance and assistance, while state agencies and universities manage the reserves and provide matching funds. MANERR is managed by the renowned University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute. Paul Montagna, a research professor in the institute, is the manager.

"The western Gulf of Mexico has a number of unique features, including coastal prairies, oak savannahs, and extensive seagrass and black mangrove communities that will help broaden the understanding of estuarine ecosystems nationwide," said Montagna. "Research and monitoring here will help coastal decision makers manage these vital resources on a foundation of sound science, and it will help to educate the next generation of marine scientists and decision makers. This is good for Texas and good for the nation."

Other speakers included Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Rep. Solomon Ortiz (D-TX), as well as Lee Fuiman, director of UTMSI; Georgia Neblett, mayor of Port Aransas; Mary Ann Rankin, dean of the UT College of Natural Sciences; and Colleen McHugh, University of Texas System regent. The NOAA estuarine reserve system comprises 27 locations in 21 states and Puerto Rico that are protected for research, education, outreach, and stewardship. Mission-Aransas will be the third largest reserve in the system, which encompasses more than 1.3 million acres.

The new reserve is located in Aransas and Refugio counties, about 30 miles northeast of Corpus Christi and includes wetland, upland and marine environments typically found in the western Gulf of Mexico. The first reserve in this biogeographic subregion, Mission-Aransas will attract scientists and students from across the nation, including up to two national graduate research fellows funded annually by NOAA. NERR designation ensures access to federal funding for research and education programs, environmental monitoring and science-based training programs for coastal managers and decision makers.

Mission-Aransas also will contribute to the System-Wide Monitoring Program, which collects weather and water quality data from all 27 reserves and provides coastal data to the burgeoning Integrated Ocean Observing System.

The designation ceremony culminated a four-year process, from site selection through the environmental impact study and the development of a comprehensive management plan. The Mission-Aransas site was proposed by Texas governor Rick Perry in 2002.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, 61 countries and the European Commission to develop a global network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects. For more information: http://www.nerrs.noaa.gov/Texas/welcome.html.

Coastal Services Center Helps Develop Storm-surge Scenarios Published in Miami Herald

An article about the potential hurricane catastrophe that looms over South Florida recently appeared on the front page of the Miami Herald. NOAA's Coastal Services Center teamed with storm-surge experts from the NOAA Tropical Prediction Center/National Hurricane Center to develop two scenarios to illustrate what would happen if hurricanes of the magnitude of Katrina and Wilma made landfall in greater Miami, Florida, in the same manner that they struck Louisiana and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula last year. For more information, contact Ethan Gibney.

FEMA Supports NOAA Coast Survey Work to Help Clear Mississippi State Waters

This week, the Office of Coast Survey will begin hydrographic surveys in Mississippi state waters in collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. FEMA is supporting this effort to locate and map hazards and marine debris that may pose risks to commercial fishing and shrimping activities in the Gulf. The ultimate goal is to locate and remove hazards from the state's near-shore and offshore waters. This ongoing recovery effort will build stronger links between federal and state agencies responsible for response planning and repairing critical infrastructure following a devastating storm. For more information, contact Tim Osborn.

Fishery Management Council Approves Reef Fish Amendment 26 Establishing an Individual Fishing Quota for Red Snapper Fishery

Tampa, Florida – May 3, 2006 - After spending nearly six years in development, Reef Fish Amendment 26, which establishes an IFQ system for commercial red snapper, received resounding approval from eligible voters. While the Department of Commerce will have the final say in whether or not the measure is approved, 87% (weighted) of those who returned a ballot voted in favor of the IFQ amendment. "We're tired of wasting fish," said David Krebs of Destin, Florida, adding that "VMS and a quota system is the only way we're going to save the fishery."

At its March meeting, the Gulf Council voted to forward Reef Fish Amendment 26 to the Secretary of Commerce for review and consideration. Under the red snapper IFQ program, also known as Amendment 26 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan, individual fishing quotas will be assigned to current permit holders based on historical landings. Class 1 reef fish permit holders will choose ten consecutive years between 1990 and 2004, and Class 2 reef fish permit holders will choose five years between 1998 and

2004. For those fishermen who hold a Class 1 historical captain's license, individual quotas will be assigned based on a seven-year average of historical landings.

For years, the red snapper fishery has been marked by overcapitalization. The current limited entry and closed season management system has encouraged fishermen to engage in derby-type fishing where participants race to harvest as many fish as possible before the quota is taken and the fishery closed. "We stepped up, identified problems, and went forward with ways to address those problems," said Donald Waters, a commercial fisherman from Pensacola, Florida who also serves on the Red Snapper IFQ Advisory Panel.

It is hoped that working under an IFQ system, product quality will increase by improving fishing and handling methods. A reduction in bycatch is also anticipated because fishermen will be allowed greater flexibility in operations. "IFQs often create an incentive for fishermen to conserve the resource by giving them a long-term interest in the health and productivity of the fishery," said Wayne Swingle, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. "We won't be racing out there for ten days trying to wipe out everything that's out there," said Krebs. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the IFQ program will become effective in 2007.

Area Where Hurricanes Develop is Warmer, Say NOAA Scientists

The region of the tropical Atlantic where many hurricanes originate has warmed by several tenths of a degree Celsius over the 20th century, and new climate model simulations suggest that human activity, such as increasing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, may contribute significantly to this warming. This new finding is one of several conclusions reported in a study by scientists at NOAA's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory in Princeton, N.J., published today in the Journal of Climate.

"This very long-term increase in temperature may seem small, but is comparable in magnitude to shorter time-scale, multi-decadal changes that many scientists now believe contribute strongly to an increase in hurricane activity in the Atlantic," said Thomas Knutson, lead author of the paper and a senior research meteorologist at GFDL. "The challenge is to understand the relative roles of anthropogenic and natural factors in producing these temperature changes – and this study is a step in that direction – and then to determine whether and how these long-term changes in temperature could be affecting Atlantic hurricane activity." Read the full story at http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/releases2006/may06/noaa06-049.html.

NOAA Concludes Successful Hurricane Awareness Tour

With the official start of the Atlantic hurricane season less than one month away, NOAA's 2006 Hurricane Awareness Tour came to a successful conclusion today in Tampa, Fla., delivering its message of the need for hurricane preparedness to thousands of visitors and media audiences. More than 4,000 students and other guests throughout the Gulf Coast region toured "Kermit," one of NOAA's Lockheed WP-3D Orion hurricane hunter aircraft, during stops in Brownsville and Beaumont, Texas; Mobile, Ala.; and West Palm Beach and Tampa, Fla., which were extensively covered by local and regional media.

Max Mayfield, director of NOAA's National Hurricane Center, emphasized the importance of an individual hurricane plan. "We know that people who have a hurricane plan, and execute that plan, fair much better than those that do not," said Mayfield. "Each person needs to take individual responsibility and make preparations now."

NOAA's National Weather Service forecast offices arranged the event with local governments, emergency managers, FEMA, schools, the public, and the media in a team effort to increase hurricane awareness and encourage preparedness in this vulnerable area of the nation. "Educating the public is an ongoing mission. Hurricane season starts on June 1 and coastal residents need to be prepared," said Bill Proenza, director of NOAA National Weather Service's southern region.

Shoreline Change Workshop Brings National Experts

A managing shoreline change workshop was recently held in Charleston, S.C., and brought together more than 75 researchers and coastal managers interested in shoreline change and coastal management decisions. Participants reviewed technology, tools, data, and procedures used to analyze shoreline change, as well as federal programs that are developing and applying shoreline data sets—with the ultimate goal of unifying local and national needs. The workshop was hosted by the Coastal Services Center and co-sponsored by NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. For more information, visit www.csc.noaa.gov/shoreconf or contact Tara Miller.

NOAA Coast Survey Prepares for Beginning of 2006 Hurricane Season

On May 1, Office of Coast Survey (OCS) personnel participated in a Houston/Galveston Port Coordination Team meeting along with the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and industry representatives. During the meeting, a hurricane simulation imitating a hurricane hitting the Houston/Galveston area and a run through of the high level coordination that will be carried out in such an event was conducted. OCS will also conduct a field and operational preparedness trip throughout the Gulf Region at the end of the month. The 2006 hurricane season begins on June 1. For more information, contact Howard Danley.

Rookery Bay NERR Sponsors Marine Industry Career Fair

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Florida last Saturday (May 6) hosted "Dive into Oceans," a career fair to spotlight marine industry careers available in Southwest Florida. Sponsored by Diving Equipment and Marketing Association, the Oceans for Youth Foundation, the Marine Industries Association of Florida, Inc., and the Collier County School Board, the event included a 15,000 gallon "Try SCUBA" dive tank for adults and kids over the age of ten to see what its like to breathe underwater. A mock of the submersible research vessel the "DeepWorker" was on the premises throughout the event, as well as U.S. Coast Guard and marine law enforcement patrol vessels, a behind-the-scenes IMAX film, and other hands-on experiences. Exhibitors included numerous marine industry representatives, including area dive shops, marine researchers, dive magazines, and underwater filmmakers, as well as third-generation oceanographer Fabien Cousteau and underwater filmmaker Marty Snyderman, to provide information on careers revolving around our oceans. For more information, contact George Cathcart.

In the Gulf States

Alabama Announces Opening of Aquatic Biodiversity Center

Largest state-operated aquatic wildlife restoration program in the United States

Trussville, Ala.—Alabama Gov. Bob Riley and Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Commissioner Barnett Lawley today announced the opening of the new \$2 million Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center located in Marion, Ala. The Biodiversity Center houses the largest state aquatic wildlife restoration program in the United States. Following a news conference, Gov. Riley, Commissioner Lawley and others released snails into the Cahaba River to help aid in clean water efforts. Snails and mussels, which are also called mollusks, are considered nature's vacuum cleaner. Snails eat algae that can literally choke a river if left uncontrolled. Mussels remove bacteria in the water. The Biodiversity Center was created to restore millions of mollusks in areas where their numbers have dwindled. "Through this revolutionary program, we are taking another step in cleaning up Alabama's water, and we're doing it naturally," said Gov. Riley. "By restoring millions of these snails and mussels, Alabamians will enjoy cleaner rivers, lakes and streams for years to come."

Program Uses Mollusks and Fish to Filter Water Naturally

The Biodiversity Center will both protect snail and mussel species and restore those species that are threatened with extinction. According to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) 67 mollusk species have become extinct over the past 80 years. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 183 Alabama lakes and streams are considered troubled bodies of water—far fewer than Georgia, Tennessee and Mississippi, but still a concern for state officials.

"Alabamians want clean water," said Lawley. "The Environmental Protection Agency and Alabama Department of Environmental Management have imposed clean water standards that must be met and that all Alabamians deserve. As a state agency, we've required sanitation devices on larger boats, but this is another major step toward cleaner water. For example, just one three-inch mussel can filter more than 12 gallons of water per day. So imagine what happens when you add hundreds of millions of snails and mussels to our rivers and streams."

The Biodiversity Center will first target the Coosa River at the Weiss Lake bypass in the Mobile River Basin because mollusk species in that basin are most at risk. For more information visit http://www.outdooralabama.com/programs/aquatic.cfm.

Governor Bush Approves 2006 Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday

On April 27, 2006, Governor Jeb Bush signed legislation authorizing Florida's second annual 12-day sales tax holiday for hurricane preparedness. The Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday is an important component of Governor Bush's comprehensive plan to instill a "culture of preparedness" in Florida. Prepared citizens are better equipped to provide for the safety of their families, reduce damage to their homes and recover more quickly from a disaster.

Coinciding with National Hurricane Preparedness Week, the tax holiday begins on Saturday, May 21 and ends on the first day of the 2006 Hurricane Season, June 1 – just 35 days away. The 12-day holiday will

save Floridians an estimated \$41 million. Visit <u>MyFlorida.com</u> or <u>FloridaDisaster.org</u> for more information on the 2006 season, disaster preparedness and the sales tax holiday.

Coral Reef Initiative Hosts Marine Tourism Workshop

- Marine entrepreneurs learn how preserving coral reefs will safeguard businesses -

SOUTHEAST FLORIDA –The Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI) presented a series of free workshops for the marine tourism industry during May in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach Counties entitled "Coral Reefs & Sustainable Marine Tourism: Protect Your Business by Protecting Your Reef." The workshops featured international and local experts to discuss the socioeconomic value of coral reefs, innovative local solutions and how to market sustainability.

"Reefs are vital to Southeast Florida's flourishing tourism industry, recreational and commercial fisheries and help sustain more than 60,000 jobs annually." said Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)'s Director of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas Stephanie Bailenson. "Scuba instructors, dive boat operators, fishing charters, marinas and coastal hotels all have a stake in the health of our coral reefs."

DEP and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) coordinated the formation of the SEFCRI team with guidance from the US Coral Reef Task Force to identify priority actions needed to protect the corals off of Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin Counties. The SEFCRI team is comprised of interagency marine resource professionals, scientists, non-governmental organizations and other interested stakeholders. For additional information about SEFCRI, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/.

New K-4 Interactive Louisiana Wetlands CD

K-4 teachers can now get copies of the new educational CD "Thibodeaux's Treasure." This interactive CD teaches children about the Louisiana wetlands. The CD teaches basic skills and inspires coastal stewardship through a cartoon-learning environment. It includes information as basic as ABCs and counting and as complex as evaluative responses to wetland science questions and issues. The CD includes an interactive hurricane tracking chart, interviews with people in Louisiana wetlands, games and a variety of lessons aligned with Louisiana GLEs. Children can play the game two ways. They can complete the map quest with Jeanne and Tee-Boudreaux in search of a treasure or they can focus on each game individually by going to the tree house. Louisiana's coastal wetlands are a dynamic ecosystem. Share the excitement of learning about this unique part of America by bringing the CD to your classroom.

The CD was produced by the US Geological Survey (USGS) and the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Public Outreach Committee in conjunction with the Barataria Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP), America's WETLAND Campaign, and the National Park Service (NPS) -Jean Lafitte Historical Park and Preserve. NOTE: One CD can be loaded on to as many computers as you have in your lab. To order this FREE CD send your name, mailing address with your school name and location to: heidi_hitter@usgs.gov.

Or write: Heidi Hitter, Coastal Planning, Protection and Restoration Act

NWRC 700 Cajundome Blvd.

Lafayette, LA 70506

FEMA Approves Another \$21.62 Million In Public Works Money for Mississippi

BILOXI, Miss. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved three grants totaling \$21.62 million to assist with oversight and repairs to the Hancock County Port and Harbor and the Mississippi Coast Coliseum. FEMA's share of the funding totals \$19.46 million, or 90 percent. State government and the applicants will share the remaining 10 percent cost.

The largest grant, \$10.72 million, is to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency for the services of an accounting firm to work with cities, counties and eligible non-profit corporations to track spending and ensure contract compliance. The costs are for six months of services between January 9, 2006 and July 8, 2006.

A grant totaling \$6.64 million is being used to repair damages to the Port Bienville Railroad, which is operated by the Hancock County Port and Harbor Commission. The funds will replace or reline over 13,000 cross ties, repair over 10,000 linear feet of track and replace over 18,000 linear feet of rail damaged by high winds and a strong storm surge from Hurricane Katrina on August 29.

A third grant, totaling \$2.07 million, is for repairs and replacement costs at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum, which also was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The funds are needed to replace equipment and furniture lost in the storm and to repair parts of the building. To date, FEMA's Public Assistance program has obligated \$1,079,636,403 to 890 applicants throughout the storm-battered region.

4,715 Adopt-A-Beach Volunteers Clean Texas' Coast

Texas General Land Office Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup tallies 97 tons of trash

AUSTIN — More than 4,700 volunteers removed 97 tons of trash from Texas beaches last weekend. "Despite the rain and windy conditions, this year's Spring Cleanup was very successful, and we have thousands of volunteers to thank for it," said Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. "If we had to pay for what these folks do, it would cost the state a small fortune. Anyone who goes to a Texas beach should be grateful for these volunteers who braved the bad weather to help keep Texas beaches safe."

The Texas General Land Office's Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup is an all-volunteer effort to remove trash from Texas' shores. Coastal cleanups are held three times each year and the program's success is due to the hard work of volunteers, including local coordinators who work many unpaid hours publicizing the cleanups in coastal communities.

Statewide, 4,715 volunteers removed more than 97 tons, or 195,280 pounds, of trash from about 153 miles of Texas beaches. Most of the trash consisted of typical items, such as cigarette butts, soda cans, beer bottles, beach toys and tires. Among the less typical items found were a shotgun, wig, satellite TV remote, toilet seat, tortilla-making machine, shovel, tent, lapel pin, cigar cutter, mattress, machete and an oil painting, as well as shotgun shells, lottery tickets, mini blinds and 18 coconuts.

Texas beaches receive large amounts of marine debris due to a convergence of currents in the Gulf of Mexico. Since 1986, more than 340,000 Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have picked up more than 6,400 tons of this debris, some of it originating from as far away as Greece. Volunteers record data on the trash to

learn more about the causes of marine debris and to help mitigate pollution along Texas' 367 miles of coastline. The Adopt-A-Beach Spring Cleanup is one of three all-volunteer seasonal cleanups coordinated through the Adopt-A-Beach Program of the Texas General Land Office. The next coastwide cleanup will be the Fall Adopt-A-Beach effort scheduled for Saturday, September 23, 2006.

The success of the Adopt-A-Beach Program is made possible by the generous efforts of dedicated volunteers and the strong support of community leaders and sponsors across the state. This year the Adopt-A-Beach Program thanks its statewide Spring Cleanup sponsors: Halliburton, ExxonMobil, Newfield Foundation and Flint Hills Resources.

Coastal Permits Easier to Get with New Office in Galveston

Upper Coast Permit Center is a one-stop shop serving 10 counties

AUSTIN – Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office and chairman of the Coastal Coordination Council, today announced the opening of a new office at Texas A&M University at Galveston to help residents, small businesses and local governments apply for environmental permits within the state's coastal zone.

The Upper Coast Permit Service Center serves an area that includes Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Jefferson, Liberty, Matagorda, Orange and Wharton counties. It joins the Lower Coast Permit Service Center, located in Corpus Christi, which has been in operation since 2001. "This office makes it easier for anyone to get the state and federal permits needed for any coastal project, whether it's building a pier or dredging an existing boat basin," Patterson said. "This commonsense solution has worked well in Corpus Christi and I'm glad to be able to expand it to the upper coast."

The staff at the Upper Coast Permit Service Center will help applicants seeking environmental permits or certifications from the General Land Office, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Railroad Commission of Texas and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Staff members at the office will not only provide guidance on obtaining commonly requested permits, but will schedule pre-application meetings with agency staffers, and work to identify problems that might hinder the issuing of a permit. The staff will also track and monitor permit applications and even help to resolve conflicts between applicants and permitting agencies.

The Permit Service Centers are funded under the Texas Coastal Management Program, which is overseen by the Coastal Coordination Council. More information can be obtained by calling 866-894-3578 or visiting the Permit Service Center Web site at www.glo.state.tx.us/psc

Patterson Signs Lease for Biggest Offshore Wind Farm in U.S. History

Second major Land Office wind lease in a year a prescription for America's addiction to oil

AUSTIN — Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office, today announced details of the state's second offshore wind farm — a Texas-sized development off the coast of Padre Island National Seashore. "Today I'm announcing one cure for America's addiction to oil," Patterson said. "This lease is the biggest in the country — what else would you expect from Texas? Anyone paying high energy costs understands the importance of what we're doing here today."

The multi-million dollar agreement — the second such lease in less than a year from the Land Office's "Texas wind rush" — grants Superior Renewable Energy rights to 39,900 acres of submerged lands in the

Gulf of Mexico, just off the coast of Padre Island and south of Baffin Bay. The company plans to build a wind farm there that will generate up to 500 Mw of power — enough to satisfy a small city, or about 125,000 homes. "When completed, this will be the biggest offshore wind farm in U.S. history," Patterson said. "It affirms the Lone Star State's position as the home for offshore wind energy in the United States. Like I said in 2003, the great Texas wind rush is on."

Superior Renewable Energy brings a wealth of industry experience to the project. The company is developing large-scale wind energy projects in New Mexico, South Dakota, California and Hawaii. John Calaway, Superior Renewable Energy's CEO, is a former Texas oil executive who founded Edge Petroleum Corporation before leaving the hydrocarbon business in 1999 to focus on renewable energy. "The time for wind energy is now. As Texas leads the world into the next energy millennium, wind will be an inexhaustible source of power for Texans for generations to come," Calaway said. "Superior is ready to lead the way." Superior is an independent renewable energy company formed in 2002 to engage in the development of large-scale wind power generation projects. Headquartered in Houston, the company is focused on using sophisticated data analysis to identify promising prospects for the development of wind power, solving complex wind development issues, and successfully executing the development of innovative wind projects.

LEASE DETAILS

The lease provides Superior Renewable Energy a 4-year period for research, after which the company will begin construction of enough turbines to produce a minimum of 250 Mw of electricity. Superior Renewable Energy has plans to expand the offshore wind farm to 500 Mw or more. Under the lease, Superior Renewable Energy is allowed to assess Texas coastal winds, develop a production plan and construct the wind farm — all with its own money.

MONEY FOR SCHOOLS

Every penny earned by the Land Office from this and every other lease is constitutionally dedicated to the Texas Permanent School Fund, which helps pay for public education in Texas. Traditionally, this fund has benefited from oil and gas revenue from state lands.

The General Land Office expects Texas schools to earn anywhere from \$34 million to more than \$100 million from the lease, depending on how many megawatts are produced and the future price of electricity. The lease is structured to encourage early production of energy and will provide yet another revenue stream for public schools. "Texas has historically been dependent upon oil and gas." Patterson said. "But oil and gas won't last forever. It's vital that the Land Office finds new ways to earn money for the Permanent School Fund."

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Once completed, the offshore wind farm will be able to produce enough electricity to power about 125,000 homes. In comparison, producing an equal amount of electricity would require about 69 million barrels of oil, or 43.5 billion pounds of coal over the 30-year term of the lease. If burned to create electricity, that much fossil fuel would release about 270 million pounds of sulfur dioxide, 120 million pounds of nitrogen oxide, and 54 billion pounds of carbon dioxide. The wind farm will also conserve more than 900 billion gallons of fresh water over the lifetime of the lease that would have been used in the cooling system of a typical power plant. Unlike oil and gas, wind energy is relatively immune to inflation and competitively priced, because there is no fuel cost to rise and fall. As technology advances and the generation of wind energy becomes more efficient, wind power will become an increasingly competitive option.

BIRDS

The Land Office's lease with Superior Renewable Energy addresses concerns voiced by various groups representing avian interests. The lease requires the company to engage an avian specialist with at least

five years of experience in studying how wind turbines might affect the migration, movement and flight patterns of birds. It also sets forth a four-year research and analysis phase.

Superior Renewable Energy has already conducted avian research during three migratory seasons for a planned 300 Mw project on 10,000 acres leased from the Kenedy Memorial Foundation.

In the event an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, the company is obligated to follow pre and post construction mitigation strategies, if any, as set forth by the report provided by the avian specialist. The scope and content of the avian specialist's report must be approved by the Land Office.

TEXAS WIND RUSH

Since taking office in 2003, Patterson has made Texas the leader in U.S. wind power.

The Land Office has already earned more than \$822,000 in royalties from the Delaware Mountains wind farm in West Texas. In 2005, the Land Office signed the nation's first lease for an offshore wind farm off the coast of Galveston that is expected to earn a minimum of \$26.5 million. Work on that project is now under way by Galveston-Offshore Wind, a division of Louisiana-based Wind Energy Systems Technologies (W.E.S.T., LLC).

Efforts to develop offshore wind power in other states, like New York and Massachusetts, have become mired in congressional politics and bureaucratic tangles. Texas, with its unique sovereignty over coastal waters out to 10.36 miles in the Gulf of Mexico, avoids those troubles. In 1836, after securing independence from Mexico, Texas claimed the offshore boundaries observed under Spanish, then Mexican rule. Sam Houston, president of the new republic, successfully maintained sovereignty over all submerged lands when Texas entered the Union in 1845. Because of Houston's foresight, Texas offers a regulatory environment friendly to both investors and renewable energy pioneers like W.E.S.T., Superior Renewable Energy, and others.

Texas has other advantages for the development of offshore wind power. Coastal winds tend to rise during the day when the state's electrical generating capacity faces peak demand, therefore generating power when it's most needed — and commands the highest price. The gentle slope of the continental shelf off the Texas Gulf Coast makes the development of offshore wind farms easy, and they can be built close to major markets, such as Houston, Corpus Christi, the Rio Grande Valley and the Golden Triangle. Running power lines from wind farm-to-power grid is relatively simple, and the Land Office oversees the granting of easements over submerged state lands.

Thanks to the state's deregulation of the energy market, it's easier to send power from offshore wind farms to the state's power grid. Armed with valuable data collected during the research phases of the leases with Superior Renewable Energy and W.E.S.T., Patterson hopes to better market the Texas coast for wind energy development. "After today, whenever Massachusetts, New York and California try to court wind energy developers, I think they'll find a sign on the door that says, 'Gone To Texas,'" Patterson said.

Scientists Fear for Nesting Turtles

May 08, 2006 — By Lynn Brezosky, Associated Press

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas — Endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles emerge here every spring from the Gulf of Mexico, leaving smeary trails of flipper prints from surf through sand to nests where they lay their eggs. But a planned beach-restoration project could mean vehicles intruding on the nesting grounds, sand dumped over eggs or new sand obscuring the paths to turtles' nests. The city is awaiting a decision from the Army Corps of Engineers on a variance from the Endangered Species Act that would

allow the project to begin this month or next. Officials say the beach erosion caused by tides and last year's hurricanes is threatening property and needs to be repaired soon.

"Probably from a sea turtle standpoint, it's the worst two months of the year to do it," said Jeff George, curator of Sea Turtle Inc., South Padre's hospital for injured sea turtles and a partner with Fish & Wildlife in rescuing turtle eggs. Jody Mays, a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other turtle experts agreed May and June are the two worst months. "But I don't want to be a tree hugger and say we can't do it," he said. "We can help put patrols out there and protect the nests. At the same token, you also have to say, why do you have to do it in May or June?"

If not alleviated soon, the erosion could harm hotels and other properties, said Catherine Ball, planner for the town of South Padre Island. Ball said the town was prepared to provide some extra hands -- college students or volunteers -- to help find the turtle nests. Each year biologists collect and guard the eggs until late summer, when thousands of baby turtles scamper to sea. Without biologists' intervention, only a few would survive.

Without major disturbances, this year promises to be a good one for nest finds. At least 25 had been discovered on Texas beaches this past week, compared with five for the same period last year. By the end of April 26, the first day of the protection project, 10 nests had been found. The eggs will be monitored for the 48- to 62-day incubation period. Once born, the turtles spend their lives at sea, with only females coming on shore again to nest on the beach where they were hatched. The vast majority of Kemp's ridleys nest on a beach in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, just south of Texas. A home movie from 1947 shows about 40,000 nesting there. But the population has diminished dramatically because eggs were harvested for food or because shrimp trawls and gill nets trapped and drowned the turtles.

Beaches along South Padre and North Padre islands have been less-used nesting spots, and biologists hope their efforts to protect them will bring more females and create another major resting ground. The beach on the north end of town, where South Padre's strip of hotels and high-rise condominiums peters out, has been eroding for many years, said Don Hockaday of the University of Texas-Pan American Coastal Studies Laboratory. The town usually keeps on top of the problem by using spoils from dredgings of the ship channel leading to the Port of Brownsville.

In January it became clear that Katrina, Rita and other storms from the 2005 hurricane season had dragged so much sand into the channel that ships were in danger of grounding. The port used took most of its annual dredging budget to remedy that problem, and the scooped sand was dumped at sea. Unfortunately, South Padre officials realized too late, the winter tides had been particularly hard on the island and they could have used the sand. Long-forgotten retaining walls were re-emerging, and dune markers that used to be 2 feet higher than the beach are now 5 feet higher. The schedule for the next port dredging, which would have begun in early fall, depends on what happens with the federal budget for 2007. "Right now we need sand," Ball said. "The erosion is not only taking dunes, it's lowering the elevation of the beach." The town has identified another source of sand and has applied for the variance, which would allow the work to go forward during turtle season, Ball said.

Other News

National Guidance Issued to Prepare Ships as Artificial Reefs

Contact Information: Dale Kemery, (202) 564-4355 / kemery.dale@epa.gov

(5/9/06) EPA and the Maritime Administration have jointly released guidance recommending environmental best management practices (BMPs) for cleaning ships that are to be sunk as artificial reefs. This guidance will promote consistency and help to ensure that obsolete and decommissioned military and commercial vessels sunk for this purpose will be environmentally sound.

The guidance identifies materials or categories of materials that may be onboard ships, where they may be found, general clean-up performance goals, and information on how to achieve those goals. Verifying that the BMP goals were met can help support permit and certification decisions for vessel-to-reef projects. Reaching the clean-up goals, along with strategic site selection, will set the scene for these vessels to benefit the environment as artificial reefs. Guidance on artificial reefs: http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/habitat/artificialreefs/

May is American Wetlands Month

During the month of May, the Nation will celebrate American Wetlands Month, focusing on the economic benefits that wetlands provide. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) joins with other federal, state and local agencies and private partners to recognize the wonderful ways that wetlands enrich the environment and society. Events are scheduled all across the country to educate and involve Americans in better understanding the importance of one of Earth's most valuable and fragile ecosystems.

Also known as marshes, swamps and bogs, wetlands are important for flood control, acting as buffers to absorb and reduce damage caused by flood waters. They also help to remove pollutants from water, cleaning streams and lakes, thereby reducing the cost of drinking water treatment. Wetlands are productive ecosystems, which support sometimes rare plant and animal habitat. They are important to the multi-billion dollar commercial fishing industry and provide a boost to recreational industry activities, such as fishing, birding, canoeing and hunting. While more than half of the nation's original wetlands have been lost or converted to other uses in the lower 48 states, EPA's goal is an over all increase in quality and quantity of wetlands nationwide.

More Information -

American Wetlands Month

<u>Learn more about the importance of wetlands in protecting the Gulf of Mexico</u> in PDF (2 pages, 567 KB) American Wetlands Month Fact Sheet in PDF (2 pages, 737 KB)

EPA Unveils First-Ever Assessment of U.S. Wadeable Streams

Contact Information: Dale Kemery, (202) 564-4355 / kemery.dale@epa.gov

(Washington, D.C. - May 5, 2006) What's the state of the union's streams? EPA set out to answer that question in a just-completed, multiyear study of wadeable streams across the country. The study, Wadeable Streams Assessment (WSA), is the first consistent evaluation of the streams that feed rivers,

lakes, and coastal waters. Alaska and Hawaii were not included in the report but have pilot projects underway. "Wadeable streams" are those which are shallow enough to be adequately sampled without a boat. They are essential natural resources that have been under-sampled in the past.

"This scientific report card on America's streams will help citizens and governments measure the health of their watersheds, take actions to prevent pollution, and monitor for progress," said Assistant Administrator for Water Benjamin H. Grumbles. "Small streams are connected to the overall health of a community's ecology and economy and this report underscores their importance and identifies priority work ahead."

Conducted between 2000 and 2004, the study was based on sampling at 1,392 sites selected to represent the condition of all streams that share similar ecological characteristics in various regions. It was a collaborative effort that involved dozens of state environmental and natural resource agencies, federal agencies, universities and other organizations. More than 150 field biologists were trained to collect environmental samples using a standardized method.

What Did They Find?

The survey found that stream conditions vary widely across the diverse ecological regions of the country, and that streams in the West were in the best condition. Humans, the researchers found, have a significant impact on wadeable streams. A majority of streams showed evidence of human influence along the streams, such as dams, pavement and pastures. The WSA measured key chemical and physical indicators that reveal stress, or degradation of streams. The most widespread stressors observed are nitrogen, phosphorus, and streambed sediments, which smother aquatic habitat and degrade conditions for fish. Nitrogen and phosphorus are nutrients that can increase the growth of algae, decrease levels of dissolved oxygen and cloud the water.

What's Next?

The WSA is part of a series of surveys to evaluate all of the nation's waters. Coastal condition has already been evaluated. During the next five years, EPA will sample the condition of lakes, large rivers, and wetlands. Then the process will be repeated to provide ongoing comparisons of the state of the waters and point to possible future action. More information on Wadeable Streams Assessment: http://www.epa.gov/owow/streamsurvey

Corps Updates Progress on the New Orleans-area Hurricane Protection System

WASHINGTON (April 28, 2006) - With the official start of the 2006 hurricane season little more than a month away, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues to make significant progress toward its initial goals of repairing and strengthening those segments of the hurricane protection system that were damaged by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"There is a great deal of work yet to be completed and inspected to meet the 1 June goal," said Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley, USACE director of Civil Works. "The Corps continues to work aggressively with our many contractor partners to keep this work on schedule. "We will also work to ensure the citizens of the New Orleans area are kept fully informed of the progress of our work, and to assure them that the Corps is committed to the highest quality of design and construction."

Restoration of the damaged hurricane protection system is more than 70 percent complete and progressing rapidly. It includes:

Orleans East Bank, 54 percent Inner Harbor Navigation Channel, 84 percent New Orleans East, 77 percent St. Bernard, 88 percent Plaquemines, 83 percent

The ongoing Orleans East Bank completion percentage also reflects works being done to install temporary pumps and gate closures at the mouths of the three outfall canals. Read the full release at http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/releases/neworleans4-28.htm.

Energy

Governor Blanco Calls on Industry to Produce Environmentally Sound LNG Strategy

Release Date: 05/09/2006

BATON ROUGE, LA--Today, Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco announced her decision to deny the Freeport McMoran application for new liquefied natural gas facilities off the coast of Louisiana. As she has consistently stated over the past two years, Louisiana stands ready to encourage the development of this growing industry. However, we must have sound scientific evidence to show that these emerging technologies will not seriously harm our already fragile Gulf ecosystem or the fisheries that are so crucial to our fishing industry.

"After considerable consultation with biologists, conservationists, business developers, and Governor Bob Riley of Alabama and Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi, I have come to the conclusion that insufficient evidence exists at this time to approve this application for an open rack vaporizer (ORV) system. The Freeport McMoran application is only one of many pending LNG projects. We must avoid the harm presented by the cumulative impact of multiple offshore LNG facilities," said Governor Blanco.

"I insist on two conditions that must be met in order to move forward with LNG expansion.

First, until reliable data on the ORV systems is produced, I will only support offshore LNG terminals using a closed loop system known to have negligible impacts to marine life. This was my longstanding and well-documented position to the industry.

Second, I will insist on Louisiana receiving a share of the revenues gained from LNG projects. This is only right. Louisiana has learned a tough lesson in not receiving a share of offshore revenues from the oil and gas industry. We cannot make the same mistake. I am asking the LNG industry to engage in revenue sharing with the coastal producing states from the outset.

I take my role as a steward of Louisiana's natural resources and public trust seriously. I also take seriously my efforts to expand industry investment in our state. We must maintain the delicate balance between

protecting the environment and exploring economic opportunities. Today's decision did not come lightly but it did come with clarity. It was the right decision.

I look forward to working with the LNG business community as the technology evolves. I urge Freeport McMoran and others in the LNG industry to apply using the environmentally sound closed loop system. We see these closed loop systems throughout the coastal United States. What's good for the Atlantic is good for the Gulf. Let's go back to the drawing board and come up with a solution that is in the longterm interest of Louisiana." For more information, contact Denise Bottcher or Roderick Hawkins at 225-342-9037.

New Model Serves as Resource for States to Cut Truck Fuel Use

Contact Information: Roxanne Smith, (202) 564-4355 / smith.roxanne@epa.gov

(5/4/06) To help facilitate more consistent, effective state truck idling laws, EPA has developed a model that states can consider adopting to help strengthen idling reduction efforts, reduce fuel consumption and improve industry compliance. Reducing idling conserves energy, helps the environment and saves industry money. Each year, truck idling consumes over one billion gallons of diesel fuel, resulting in the emission of 11 million tons of carbon dioxide, over 180,000 tons of nitrogen oxides, as well as emission of fine particulate matter and other air toxics. The model is based on input from workshops EPA held across the country last year with the trucking industry, states, and environmental and health groups. Information on the model: http://www.epa.gov/smartway/idle-state.htm.

FERC Establishes LNG Compliance Branch

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Chairman Joseph T. Kelliher today announced the establishment of a new Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Compliance Branch within the Office of Energy Projects to further the Commission's mission to ensure the safe and environmentally responsible construction and operation of LNG facilities. "The Commission has become a focal point for assuring that our nation's delivery infrastructure for clean natural gas is met. This will only continue as the industry seeks to ensure adequate LNG import capacity to meet our nation's needs," Chairman Joseph T. Kelliher said. "We previously established the LNG Engineering Branch to centralize the Commission's LNG engineering expertise. This restructuring will better position the Commission as its inspection and compliance workload grows with the increase in LNG import capacity."

The LNG Compliance Branch will be responsible for the Commission's continued safety inspections and oversight of operating LNG facilities. The staff, comprised of LNG engineers, civil and mechanical engineers, and other experts, will also review final facility design and engineering compliance with Commission orders. Chris Zerby has been appointed Chief of the new branch.

Both the new LNG Compliance Branch and the LNG Engineering Branch will work together and will continue coordinating with the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Department of Transportation and other federal, state and local agencies to address safety and security at LNG facilities. There are currently 17 operating LNG import and peak-shaving facilities under FERC jurisdiction and subject to its inspection program. Five of the eight FERC-approved import terminals are under construction. There are currently under FERC review 19 proposals for new LNG facilities.

MMS Awards Pipeline Integrity Study

URL: http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=31795 URL: http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=31795

Due to the growing concern about the integrity of Federal offshore pipelines, the Minerals Management Service (MMS) has now awarded DNV a contract to conduct a study of pipeline integrity management methods. The report will serve as the basis for a future guideline. There are more than 32,000 kilometers of lines in service in the Gulf of Mexico and some of them have been in operation for 40 years, which is beyond their anticipated service life. Hence, because of age, type of use, geo-hazards and location, there is growing concern about the integrity of some of the pipelines. There is also concern about the susceptibility of pipelines to corrosion.

Despite the growing attention given to deepwater developments, the MMS remains attentive to the needs of existing operations. The organization recognizes the many improvements made to pipeline materials, design, construction, and management over the past several decades. However, the MMS also realizes that improved inspection and monitoring systems could benefit both existing and proposed pipeline systems. With this in mind, the MMS wants to develop a methodology for assessing the safety of existing and future pipelines through the Technical Assessment and Research Program (TAR). DNV has been awarded the execution of TAR project #565 'Guidelines for the Integrity Assessment Methods of Piggable and Unpiggable Pipelines in the Gulf of Mexico'.

This project will examine pipeline data including failure data, and review offshore pipeline integrity management industry practices and regulatory requirements. Finally, it will deliver recommendations on how to assess the integrity of offshore pipelines in the Gulf of Mexico. The study aims to identify state-of-the-art and best industry practices for pipeline integrity management. Voluntary industry input and assistance on this matter will therefore be sought. The MMS goal is to use the study results as basis for a future guideline.

The scope of work is similar to DNV's recently completed study of pipeline damage caused by Hurricane Ivan. The Ivan study report will be finalized later this month. These results and the new work on Katrina and Rita will enhance the current understanding of pipeline responses to hurricane forces. Moreover, this work will identify best practices and potential changes to codes to better protect pipelines during subsequent major hurricane events.

Training and Conferences

Managing Visitor Use in Coastal Areas

As more people choose to live, work, and play along our nation's coasts and waterways, resource management professionals are challenged with balancing the changing demands of the public with the management of resources under their care. This workshop provides an overview of the human dimensions of protected area management, offers examples of visitor use and associated impacts to natural resources and visitor experiences, and demonstrates applications to help managers address the people side of resource management. This workshop has been approved for 5 Basic Certified Municipal Official hours by the Alabama League of Municipalities.

The workshop includes training sessions led by NOAA Coastal Services Center Human Dimensions staff, presentations by community leaders and regional natural resource managers, and field excursions. The speakers and activities include (in agenda sequence):

- Heidi Recksiek, & Ann Weaver, Coastal Services Center, NOAA
- Billy Duke, Mayor, City of Gulf Shores
- Herb Malone, President & CEO, Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Co-presentation by Donna Watts, CEO, South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, and Carolyn Doughty, Councilwoman, City of Gulf Shores
- L. G. Adams, Manager, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Carl Wegener, Kvichak Marine Industries
- Jeff Collier, Mayor, Town of Dauphin Island and Carl Ferraro, Natural Resource Planner, ADCNR-State Lands-Coastal Section tour of, and discussion about, Dauphin Island
- Dr. George Crozier, Executive Director, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

This two-day course provides managers with a step-by-step, easy-to-use process for identifying and defining unacceptable impacts to biological and cultural resources and to visitor experiences, and presents a range of strategies and tactics managers can use to address these impacts.

Who should attend?

Natural resource managers and staff, elected and appointed officials, city managers and environmental staff, parks & recreation officials and staff, coastal law enforcement personnel, coastal developers and realtors, resort managers, eco-tourism managers, and other interested individuals.

By the end of the course, participants should be able to:

- understand the human dimensions of coastal and marine management
- apply recreation and visitor use management planning frameworks
- identify visitor use issues, including visitor-resource and visitor-visitor impacts
- craft a clear problem statement
- develop measurable indicators for monitoring impacts and management and set standards for impact acceptability
- implement visitor use monitoring methods and management strategies and tactics

When and where?

Days & dates: Wednesday, 31 May through Thursday, 1 June 2006

Time begins: 7:45 AM check-in & continental breakfast
Time ends: 5 PM on Wednesday and 5:30 PM on Thursday

Location: Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve 11300 U.S. Highway 98

Fairhope, AL 36532

Cost and registration information:

The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission administers the Coastal Training Program budget. Please make all registration fee payments payable to: South Alabama Regional Planning Commission. The workshop fee of \$55 covers meals (including Lunch at LuLu's in Gulf Shores on Wednesday and a picnic lunch on Thursday), refreshments, and transit. Space is limited to 40 participants. No on-site registrations. Dress comfortably for field excursions.

Registration is due by Thursday, 25 May 2006.

Register online at http://www.coastaltraining-AL.com/ClassRegistration.asp?class=84.

To fax your registration: (251) 928-1792, Attn: Cheryl McClary

To mail your registration: Cheryl McClary, CTP Coordinator

Weeks Bay Reserve 11300 U. S. Highway 98 Fairhope, AL 36532

Do you need more information?

Contact Cheryl by phone at: (251) 928-9792 or by email: Cheryl.McClary@dcnr.alabama.gov
The workshop is a joint product of the: Coastal Services Center, NOAA, and the CTP at Weeks Bay Reserve, ADCNR/Lands/Coastal Section

MMS Meetings on Renewable Energy and Alternate Uses

WASHINGTON – The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today in a Federal Register notice, it will hold public scoping meetings across the country during the months of May and June of 2006 to obtain comments from the American public on renewable energy projects and alternate use of facilities in Federal waters. The meetings are the first step in the preparation of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the nation's Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Renewable Energy and Alternate Use Program.

"We welcome and encourage public participation in these important meetings, which will assist MMS in developing a Federal program to facilitate and manage renewable energy and alternate use projects on America's offshore public lands," said MMS Director Johnnie Burton. "Broad public input will ensure that MMS fully considers real and potential impacts of developing domestic offshore renewable energy sources and of permitting alternate use of facilities off our coasts."

Meetings will begin at 5 p.m.; locations of the scoping meetings can be found at http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/whatsnew/newsreal/2006/060505.pdf.

May 23, 2006 Austin, Texas Hilton Austin Airport 9515 New Airport Drive Austin, TX June 8, 2006 Orlando, Florida Embassy Suites Hotel Orlando 8978 International Drive Orlando, FL 32819

MMS is also accepting written comments for the next 60 days electronically, using the online comment form available on the project website at http://ocsenergy.anl.gov. Comments must be received by July, 5, 2006 and should specifically address factors related to the scope of the draft EIS, particularly the significant issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be considered in the draft EIS.

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov